

CHAPTER 6

Respondē Latīnē

- 1 cūr prior (*first*) ad lūdum advenit Horātia?
- 2 ubi Quīntus et Gāius adveniunt, cūr irātus est magister?
- 3 cūr dicit magister: 'Decime, asinus es'?
- 4 quid respondet Decimus?

Flavius decides to tell a story

Translate the first paragraph of the passage below and answer the questions on the second paragraph without translating

postridiē Quīntus et Horātia et Gāius mātūrē ad lūdum adveniunt, sed Decimus sērō advenit. Flāvius 'cūr sērō ad lūdum venis, Decime?' inquit. Decimus respondet: 'errās, magister. ego nōn sērō veniō. cēterī mātūrius adveniunt.' Flāvius valdē irātus est; 5 'impudēns es, Decime,' inquit; iubet eum sedere et dīlīgenter labōrāre.

mox puerī litterās scrībunt. dīlīgenter labōrānt. tandem Horātia 'magister,' inquit, 'dīlīgenter labōrāmus et litterās diū scrībimus. fessī sumus. itaque dēbēs fābulam nōbīs nārrāre.' 10 Flāvius 'ita vērō,' inquit, 'dīlīgenter labōrātis. quod bonī puerī estis, volō fābulam nārrāre.' iubet eōs attendere et sē audire.

postridiē the next day; mātūrē early
sērō late

mātūrius too early

nōbīs (to) us

ita vērō yes

volō I'm willing; sē him

- 1 What do the children do when the lesson starts? [3]
- 2 What does Horatia ask Flavius to do, and why? [3]
- 3 Why does Flavius agree to her request? [2]

EDUCATION

Most Roman citizens were literate and their children received a primary education at the local schools from the ages of six or seven to eleven or twelve. Here they were taught reading, writing and elementary arithmetic. The evidence suggests that girls as well as boys attended these schools, though they did not, at far as we know, go on to the secondary or 'grammar' schools. In our story we make both Quintus and Horatia go to the school of Flavius for their primary education but his father takes the boy away to Rome for his secondary education.

A wealthy family would appoint a slave, often a Greek, as a kind of personal tutor who would take a child to and from school. He might also act as a language assistant in Greek (see below). The two of them would be accompanied by another slave who carried the child's books. In country towns, schoolchildren went to school on their own carrying their satchels and taking along the schoolmaster's pay once a month. But when Quintus went to school in Rome, his father took him there and sat in on his lessons.



In primary education, i.e. the first three or four years, the three 'R's were hammered into boys and girls with a syllabus of reading and writing in both Latin and Greek. The pupils would write their lessons on tablets (*tabulae*) using a stylus. They would also learn elementary arithmetic using an abacus. Horace poked fun at math lessons in his poetry:

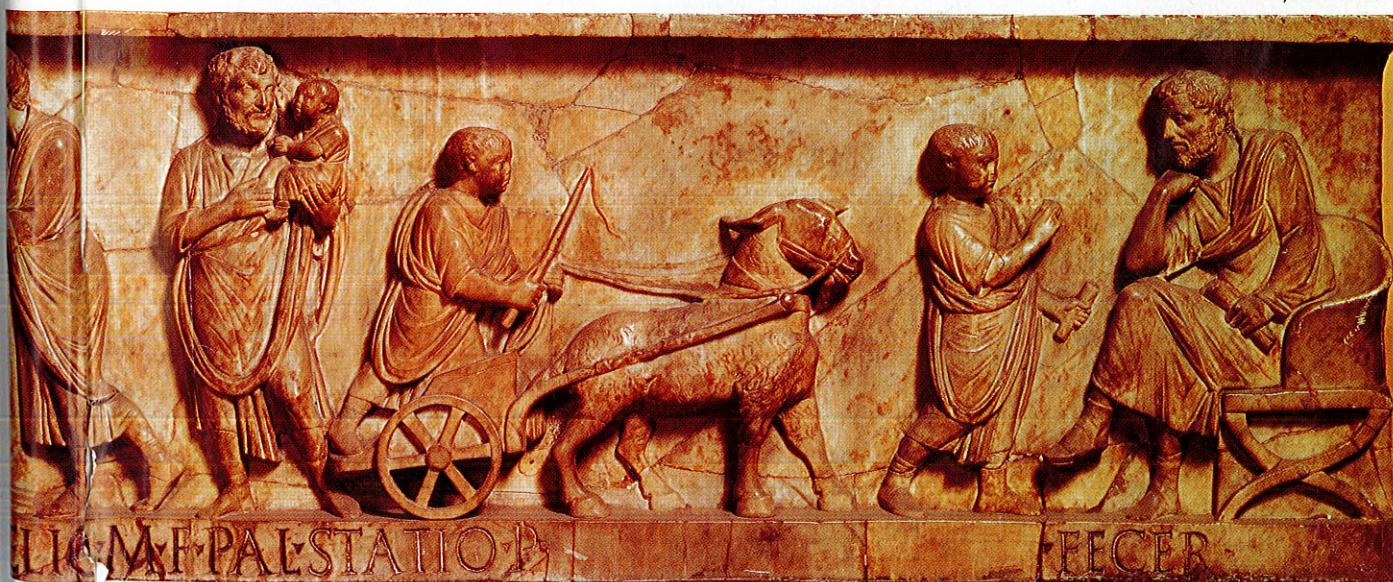
Roman boys learn how to divide a penny by a hundred with long calculations. 'Tell us, son of Albinus, what do you end up with if a twelfth is taken away from five twelfths? Can you say?' 'A third.' 'Well done! You'll end up a millionaire. What does it come to if you add a twelfth?' 'A half.' Is it any surprise that when we drag our children through these off-putting financial calculations they can't find the inspiration for poetry?

For the most part, the lessons were boring and unpleasant. Pupils sat on uncomfortable benches or chairs, often in noisy surroundings. They endlessly recited the alphabet both forwards and backwards, as well as chanting their multiplication tables again and again. Teaching started very early, soon after dawn, and a Roman poet called Martial complained violently at being woken up by the noise:

Why can't you stay out of our lives, you cursed schoolmaster, a man hateful to boys and girls alike? The crested cocks have not yet broken the silence of the night. Already you are making a noise with your cruel voice and your thwacks.

After a break for lunch lessons probably started up again. There would be a holiday every eighth day, short breaks in the winter and spring, and a very long vacation in the summer.

Scenes in a boy's education



CHAPTER 6

Boys would move on to another school around the age of eleven or twelve for their secondary education. Here they would learn grammar or literature. Greek and Greek literature were an important part of the syllabus. All educated Romans were bilingual. Though they had conquered Greece, they still recognized the greatness of Greek literature. As Horace himself wrote, 'Conquered Greece conquered its wild conqueror and brought the arts to rustic Italy.'

At the secondary stage arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy were studied as minor subjects. The curriculum was not wide. There were medical schools in Greece but in Italy there was no scientific education at all. When they were about sixteen, upper-class Roman boys went on for their tertiary education to a teacher of rhetoric who would teach them through public lectures. From him they received a thorough training in speaking and arguing, and this was a good preparation for a career in politics (see Part II, chapter 24).

After girls had dropped out of education at school after the first (primary) stage, they learned needlework, dancing, singing and lyre-playing at home.

What are the similarities and the differences between the education that you are receiving and what you would have been taught in a Roman school?

The Roman writer Pliny the Younger summed up a good school. It should have admirable teaching, firm discipline and high standards of behavior. He thought that forming the character was as important as training the mind. What do you think?

*The Romans themselves were puzzled that *lūdus*, the Latin word for school, also means a game. One writer thought that the word might have been chosen to lead children to believe that school was more fun than it actually was. It is also possible that the term comes from a time when sports, PE, were the basis of Roman education. What do you think?*